

Story Notes report

PAGE NOTES

- No character list required in spec script format.
- p. 1 Shorten description blocks. No more than three lines per.
- "INT - OFFICE" — include a time of day on all scene headings. Stick to DAY, NIGHT and LATER. Just good form!
- p. 2 Easy on the parentheticals. Use them only when it's not clear how the line should be delivered — e.g., "that's great!" when it's meant to be "(sarcastic)".
- p. 5 and p. 7 — "(pause)" not widely used..."(beat)" indicates a pause in dialogue. Also, use a semi-colon in parentheticals: "(beat;smiles)"
- p. 6 Opening scene goes on for 6 long pages, and very talky — what's done here could be handled in two, and would have far more impact. Remember, your first scene is your grabber...you've got to hook the audience quickly.
- p. 7 "Dean is opening" — use active voice ("Dean opens") rather than passive voice throughout.
- p. 7 No need to describe Diana's outfit, etc. Stick to a few pithy words about each character when they're introduced. Less when, like Diana, they're not main characters.
- p. 8 "He is one of Dean's few close friends" — in description, you have to limit yourself to only that which can be seen. If it's in description, the audience will never know it, because they will never read the script!
- p. 9 Danforth on TV — confusing. Show Danforth, with a graphic identifying him as Danforth on the TV screen.
- p. 9 Why does Dean mumble "William Danforth?" Be interesting if somehow he was involved in what follows, if he and Danforth had a secret history as well...
- p. 9 "nuerotic" — "neurotic"
- p. 11 Use proper montage format here: MONTAGE, on its own line, followed by short scenes (optionally marked with a A), B), C)...., or just a dash "-").
- p. 11 Is this montage really necessary?
- p. 13 "plastered" — "plastered"
- p. 13 "Seinfeld" — titles should be underlined, including movies (like "Top Gun" on p. 53) and etc.
- p. 14 Remember, every scene should a. Advance plot, or b., Reveal character. Eliminate scenes which do neither, or fold them into other scenes.
- p.15 and elsewhere: "Dean's POV" s/b "DEAN'S POV" on its own line, as a shot. Then, BACK TO SCENE.
- p. 16 Dean playing with executive toy — funny!
- p. 16 "Shot widens" — avoid "directing" in your script. Use description blocks strategically to indicate narrative flow in a visual way, but leave camera directions out.
- p. 17 "peaking" — "peeking"
- p. 17 The chain lock arrangement confusing, needs to be clarified.

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- pp. 19-20 Sarah's monologues here too long.
- pp. 20-21 — two mentions of "Donny", but we never meet him. Generally, characters who affect the story will be the only ones the story deals with.
- p. 21 "Oh, that's a good idea!" — meant to be sarcastic?
- p. 22 Might be more effective to begin the script with this dream sequence!
- p. 24 "INSERT FLASHBACK CUT — use "FANTASY" instead.
- p. 28 How does Dean know Mrs. Hagstrom is waiting? Diana didn't call and say so...
- p. 30 "her piece of mind" — "give him a piece of her mind"
- p. 30 "fluently" — wrong word.
- p. 31 "**crazy!**" — stick to Courier regular — no bold or italics or other typefaces. As mentioned below, the only deviation should be when underlining for emphasis in dialogue.
- p. 32 This sequence ran from pp. 16-32, and should have been about half or a third as long.
- p. 32 "He sits, puzzled" — why's he puzzled? Just because he couldn't hypnotize her? Or something else? If she were the *only one* he's never been able to hypnotize, that would explain his puzzlement and be more intriguing as well.
- p. 35 "DOESN'T" — underline only for emphasis in dialogue.
- p. 38 "ahead you" — "ahead of you"?
- p. 43 Scene with Dean & Sean at the zoo — well-written, but doesn't advance the story!
- p. 46 "No sign, except Dean looks up to the small skylight that is popped open." — this could have been written more dramatically. For example:

No trace of an intruder. Dean looks up.

AN OPEN SKYLIGHT

looks down from above. Mocking him.

- p. 51 Would Dean really give patients his home phone number?
- p. 52 "seeshore" — "seashore"
- p. 52 Cut around her recounting the dream, since we've seen it and we know what happens.
- p. 54 "Focused?!" — need an "(into phone)" parenthetical here.
- p. 54 Would he really make a house call? In the middle of the night?
- p. 56 Mr. Eldridge appearance — good to get another element involved. He should appear far earlier — you want your bad guy, or his minions, to be visible as early as possible.
- p. 57 How come Dean is able to hypnotize her now? What changed?
- pp. 58-59 No need to indicate "END ACT I" and "ACT II". Act breaks in spec scripts should be evident from story alone.
- p. 60 This sequence might be more effective with POV shots of the action being described — show, don't tell!
- p. 61 Dean impersonating the Secretary of Defense — funny!
- p. 62 "crumbles up" — "crumples up"

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- p. 63 "observantly locked" — needs an object. His "gaze is locked on Sarah".
- p. 63 "cold gawk" — awkward..."cold glare" better.
- p. 66 "Thanx" — "thanks". Best not to use informal spelling in a spec script.
- p. 69 "check my methodology" — he just said the same thing on p. 68.
- p. 71 Note that they're playing Dean's session with Sarah on the tape.
- p. 73 Islington — if he was Dean's rival, that'd be a good source of additional drama here.
- p. 74 End scenes earlier — no need to waste time on pleasantries or exit chit-chat. Always end a scene on a decisive note, and never trail off.
- p. 74 "The expression of vulnerability on her face is heartwarming." Nice, but not really appropriate for screenplay description. Be spare and telegraphic in your descriptions.
- p. 75 "pysically" — "physically"
- p. 77 "INT. HOTEL ROOM 619" — you never have Dean pass into the room, though later action seems to occur within it.
- p. 79 Why won't Dean introduce Sarah to Laurel? What in their history would justify this?
- p. 79-81 Use proper montage format. Better yet, consider using something other than a montage here — series of shots or, even better, actual short scenes to show their developing relationship.
- p. 82 Who is Gabriella?
- p. 86 Like the TIME-LAPSE PHOTOGRAPHY — very few people make use of that kind of thing. Quite effective here.
- p. 90 "the old Honda Accord that was parked out in the driveway isn't there anymore..." — when did they see it before?
- p. 92 Message or letter, not both — you could make this part flow much more smoothly if it was just a message that points him in the right direction. Or if he's forced to sniff out where she's gone, because, to protect him, she's left no scent for the others to find.
- p. 93 Islington mentioned again here as being responsible for "deconditioning" — so a bad guy has been lurking about all along? More on this!
- p. 94 "We've had this conversation before" — but we haven't heard it...what are they talking about?
- p. 96 This is not really a montage, so no title needed unless you put it in montage format.
- p. 97 "INSERT FLASHBACK CLIP" — really a MEMORY HIT or MEMORY FLASH. Remember to go BACK TO SCENE afterward.
- p. 101-102 Carlos & Pepe, cool characters!
- p. 107 Need more "why" on this cover-up, or at least a hint of why it might've occurred...
- pp. 115-117 Lots of bad guy monologuing here...a bit standard, undermines the ending.
- p. 121 Clever ending, but does it need to be sad?
- p. 121 No need to "ROLL CREDITS." just use THE END.

DEVELOPMENT NOTES

Dean and Sarah are two individuals traveling a parallel course — both drifting through unsatisfactory lives. Dean's got an unsatisfying life and needs something in it. Sarah's troubled by nightmares — on top of a life that's also unsatisfying. She and Dean are very similar people. They're the answer to each other's problems — he can solve her problem, and she can solve his. This is probably the best way to go because it utilizes them both in a complimentary way that makes a unified whole.

Dean doesn't probe the nature of the Carson Project early in Act 2 — he seems hot on the trail, then inexplicably backs off. This is exactly the kind of mystery that he's been searching for in life, and you figure he would be keen to find out more about it. There could be a conflict here with his need to know vs. his growing love for Sarah.

What's the nature of Sarah's memory blockage? Who did the memory erasure? Why are these memories resurfacing now? Is there some cue, some environmental stress in her life that's triggering them? Perhaps some case in her insurance office could be the trigger — a family just like the one in her submerged memories perhaps. Or perhaps that ties in also with a family in Mexico who she got to know. Any of these would strengthen Sarah's character, and make the script more interesting.

We need to know more about Danforth. He should be revealed as an active antagonist early on in the piece. We should ultimately come to know nearly as much about Danforth's motivations as we do about Dean & Sarah's. Part of this involves the Carson Project — build and strengthen that, and you strengthen Danforth. A clear reason should be found why the project is necessary, and what it brings both countries should be spelled out. Danforth should have benefitted (probably financially) from it. Whatever he's done here, it's a golden opportunity to show just how evil and conniving he really is.

The first act should be shortened by half. The second act should focus on developing the characters and more importantly, bringing up the B story of the love affair and uniting it with the A story to lead us to a satisfying resolution. The third act should supply that resolution, and it should lead to Dean & Sarah's triumph over Danforth — and if they do not, then there'd better be a good reason which flows organically from the events leading up to it.

As mentioned, a thematic think-through — not a revision, but a "re-vision" of the script, is really needed here. Break it down into its abstract pieces and decide what story is really being told or should be told. Is it the story of Dean's redemption? How does Dean's redemption correspond to Sarah's redemption? How (and why) does Danforth prevent them from realizing their goals? Do they seek justice for the dead, or is there some other way to play it?

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Does Danforth's accession to the vice presidency threaten the country in such a way that Dean and Sarah must risk heaven and earth to stop him? Questions like this help you pinpoint the thematic core of the script. And you'll be surprised how this kind of clarification can really snap your story into focus. When you have the core all figured out, you know what scenes are necessary, and what are not, and can spend your time wisely on sequences you'll keep.

Thank you!

Thank you for the opportunity to evaluate your script! We hope you find these comments and suggestions useful, and that they lead you to better writing and greater success. We look forward to seeing more of you and your work in the future!